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Islam as Christian Trope: The Place and Function of Islam in Reformed Dogmatic Theology

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In an essay published near the end of his life, Samuel Zwemer, Christian missionary, scholar, and founding editor of *The Moslem World*, noted the strong resonance between Islamic thought and the Reformed Christian tradition. “Islam indeed...is the Calvinism of the Orient. It, too, was a call to acknowledge the sovereignty of God’s will...It, too, saw in nature and sought in Revelation the majesty of God’s presence and power, the manifestation of his glory transcendent and omnipotent...Calvinism and Islam had much in common.”¹ Islam and Reformed Christianity share high views of divine sovereignty, critiques of the human propensity to idolatry, commitments to the primacy of God’s revelation, and both issue calls to transform all of life and society in light of God. These similarities, of course, are also marked by deep disagreements on fundamental issues regarding the nature of Jesus of Nazareth, the prophethood of Muḥammad, the meaning of the cross, and the human condition—not to mention how the missionary impulses of both traditions that have often led to rivalry and recrimination. And yet, the conceptual similarities and frameworks that Zwemer notes between Islam and the Reformed or Calvinist tradition remain. This is commonly noted by other scholars and popular commentators, more often by critics of both traditions than as a means for sympathetic engagement and constructive dialogue between them. For instance, in the late 16th Century, the Catholic theologian and exile from England, William Rainolds penned a nearly thousand page treatise in Latin entitled, *Calvino-Turcismus*, which offers a polemical critical analysis of both Islam and Calvinism. In it, he

¹ Samuel Zwemer, “Calvinism and the Missionary Enterprise,” *Theology Today* 7, no 2 (1950), p. 212.

critiques both Reformed and Muslim approaches to images and icons, their scriptural literalism, divine providence, and political power. Going so far as to aver that, “The fundamental principles of Muhammadanism are far better than those of Calvinism. Both seek to destroy the Christian faith, both deny the Divinity of Christ, not only is the pseudo-Gospel of Calvin no better than the Qur’an of Muhammad, but in many respects it is wicked and more repulsive.”² As other scholars have noted, the tract is an intra-Christian polemic, and the primary aim is a critique of Calvinism and its influence in English and Scottish politics. Despite the length of the treatise, there are precious few original insights into Islam. These longstanding polemical comparisons remain popular and one finds them in recent articles, such as one in the Scottish newspaper, that compares Scottish Calvinists and ISIS.³ Or, in an evangelistic apologetics for Christian small groups, James A Beverley asserts that “Islam is more Calvinistic in its outlook than John Calvin.”⁴ The American diplomat, Graham E. Fuller draws similar comparisons between Calvinism and Islam going so far as to suggest that in Calvin, “we find...almost a blueprint for later Wahhabi thinking in Saudi Arabia. Calvin established a ‘City of God’ in Geneva and proclaimed the Bible to be the source of all community legislation—parallel to trends in much Islamist thinking that supports the Qur’an as the sole source of all legislation.”⁵ In a much more subtle and intellectually nuanced

² Quoted in Albert Hourani, *Europe and the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 26.

³ Chris Bamberg, “Terrorism and fanaticism: Were the early Calvinists Scotland’s Daesh?” *The National: Scottish News*, 8 December 2015. http://www.thenational.scot/culture/14858701.Terrorism_and_fanaticism_Were_the_early_Calvinists_Scotland_s_Daesh/ (accessed 22 June 2017).

⁴ James A Beverley, *Christ & Islam: Understanding the Faith of the Muslims* (Joplin: College Press, 2000), p. 21.

⁵ Graham E. Fuller, *A World Without Islam* (Boston: Little & Brown, 2010), p. 126.

fashion, James Noyes offers a reading of the iconoclasm of Wahhabism and Reformed Christianity as central to the formation of the modern state and market.⁶

Given the conceptual overlap between the Reformed theological tradition and Islamic thought, as well as these more polemical comparisons, Reformed theologians would appear to be well positioned to engage in constructive and comparative dialogue and debate with Muslim thinkers and the broader Islamic tradition. And yet, while missionaries and popular apologists have noted these resonances, the more systematic and dogmatic tradition of Reformed theological discourse has largely failed to engage with Islam in any substantial manner.⁷ This is a missed opportunity for improving and deepening Christian-Muslim theological exchange, as well as for advancing internal Reformed dogmatic claims about the nature of divine Speech and revelation, theologies of religion, the doctrine of God, and other theological loci. Islam is not absent, however, from the Reformed theological tradition. In fact, references to Islam, Muḥammad, the Qur'ān, and Islamic theological ideas occasionally crop up throughout the nearly five hundred year-long history of dogmatic writing. More often as a tool for polemics, both against Muslims and Christian theological opponents, or as a simplistic way to reinforce internal theological arguments, then as a significant interlocutor.

This essay aims to offer a study of the place and function of Islam in three major Reformed theologians and their systematic or dogmatic theologies, querying how Islam is depicted, and why these references fail to amount to a significant engagement. After

⁶ James Noyes, *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence and the Culture of Image-Breaking* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), chs 1-2.

⁷ A few recent exceptions to this include, Ralf K. Wüstenberg, *Islam its Hingabe: Eine Entdeckungsreise in das Innere einer Religion* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2016), which offers an engagement with Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and John Calvin, drawing attention to their similarities. Joshua Ralston, "The Way(s) of Salvation: The Function of Law in John Calvin and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali" in Michelle Voss Roberts (ed.) *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 255-273. Glenn A. Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype: The Theology of Karl Barth as a Resource for Inter-Religious Encounter in a European Context* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

examining how Francis Turretin, Fredeirch Schleiermacher, and Herman Bavinck deploy and discuss Islam in their major works of systematic theology, I will conclude by sketching what conditions would be necessary to advance Reformed theological thinking with and about Islam beyond polemical or largely superficial comparisons.

Early Reformers and Islam

While the focus of this paper will largely be the later dogmatic tradition of Reformed theology, it is worth briefly mentioning the ways in which John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger discussed and depicted Islam as their discussions, categories, and the sources they draw on, particularly Luther and Bibliander, continue to reverberate in later Reformed dogmatic theology.⁸ The increasing political and economic power of the Ottoman Empire was a central feature of 16th Century European history and led to a growing interest in the study of Islam, and particularly the Qur'ān. Nonetheless, as Emidio Campi notes, “the Reformers had only a very limited knowledge of Islam, and in that they did not differ from the leading humanists of their time.”⁹ This did not mean that the Reformers remained silent about Islam, Muslims, or the Ottoman Empire. Instead, numerous Reformers occasionally referenced Islam in their commentaries, sermons, and occasional writings. A few like Martin Luther, in his *On the War with the Turks*, and Heinrich Bullinger in a lengthy treatise, *Der Türck*, offered entire texts devoted to the subject. While these works show some awareness

⁸ For more on discussions of Islam in these thinkers, see Jan Slomp, “Calvin on the Turks” in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, eds. Yvonne Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1995), 126-142, Katya Vehlow, “The Swiss reformers Zwingli, Bullinger and Bibliander and their attitudes to Islam (1520-1560),” *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations*, 6 (1995): 229-254, Emidio Campi, *Shifting Patterns of Reformed Thought* (Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), Emidio Campi, “Early Reformed Attitudes towards Islam,” *The Near East School of Theology Theological Review* 31 (2010): 131-151, Christian Christ-von Wedel, *Theodor Bibliander (1505-1564): Bin Thurgauer im Gelehrten Zürich der Reformationszeit* (Zürich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2005), Adam Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study of Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁹ Emidio Campi, *Shifting Patterns of Reformed Thought*, 71.

of key themes, practices, and ideas in Islam, they are also marked throughout by many of the tropes and stereotypes that have dominated Western Christian discourse about Muslims since the reception of John of Damascus' depiction of Islam as a heresy.

One of the more common features of early discussions of Islam by the Reformers is how little they have to do with actual Muslims or the Islamic tradition. Mentioning Islam is more often than not an opportunity to disparage and critique Christian opponents than to debate Islamic ideas or practice. As Kate Zebiri notes "Another development, dating approximately from the time of the Reformation, was the use of Islam as a theme in internal Christian polemic."¹⁰ For instance, Luther famously interpreted Islam as another example of Roman Catholic work's righteousness and Matthew Sutcliffe responded to William Rainold's aforementioned provocative title with one of his own, *De Turcopapismo*.¹¹ These types of polemics are not limited to Catholic critiques of Calvinism, but extended to intra-Protestant polemics. The Lutheran, Matthias Hoë von Hoenegg penned, *Manifest Account of how the Calvinists Conform in ninety-nine Points with the Arians and the Turks*.¹² This is also a feature in the writings of Zwingli, Calvin, and Bullinger on Islam; they regularly reference Islam and the Turks in relationship to their critiques of the Pope and Catholics. Thus, Calvin quotes a prayer at the start of his sermons on Jeremiah and Lamentations that asks for protection and victory over "the Turks, pagans, papists and other unbelievers"¹³ He also laments that Christians appear to have more freedom under Turkish rule than evangelicals under Catholic rule in France. Like with Luther, Islam more often functions as a cipher or

¹⁰ Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: One World, X), X.

¹¹ Emanuele Colombo, "Western Theologies and Islam in the Early Modern World," in Ulrich L. Lerner, Richard A. Muller, and A.G. Roebder (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹² Jan Loop, *Johan Heinrich Hottinger: Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 222.

¹³ *Supplementa Calviniana*, 6: xxviii.

trope for critiquing the Pope and the Roman position. Islam is “really an occasion to vent his obvious criticism of Roman Catholics.”¹⁴ Bullinger engages in a similar series of arguments when he contends that Muslim practices and views of salvation by works is akin to the Catholic indulgences and thus is Pelagian.¹⁵ “He (Muhammad) makes up...the doctrine...that one can earn and merit the forgiveness of sins and eternal life...just as many popes granted indulgences of sins.”¹⁶ Similarly, Zwingli employs Islam as tool to critique Catholic practices and advance his arguments about true and false religion. As Emanuele Colombo notes, “More often the anti-Muslim literature was embedded in the religious polemics of the divided Christendom.”¹⁷

That is not to say, that these early Reformed thinkers and pastors did not also have significant theological or ethical concerns about Islam, even in the midst of their limited knowledge and propensity to use Islam as a tool of intra-Christian polemics. In addition to the aforementioned critiques of Islam regarding works righteousness, a recurring feature of these early Reformers was their correct assertion that a key, if not *the key*, issue that divides Christians from Muslims is perspectives of Jesus Christ. Certainly, these Reformers were largely unaware of the place of Jesus in Islamic thought and Muslim piety, particularly how Muslims ascribe Messiahship to Jesus and that the Qur’ān depicts him as both *kalimatuallah* (the Word from/of God) and *rūhuallah* (Spirit of/from God). They did ascertain that Muslims protest against any worship of Jesus or ascription to him a divine status or nature. In his exposition of Bullinger’s writing on the Turks, Emidio Campi succinctly notes how Bullinger sees how Christology is the axial point from which all other differences turn. “It denies that

¹⁴ Jan Slomp, “Calvin and the Turks,” p. 128.

¹⁵ Emidio Campi, *Shifting Patterns of Reformed Thought*, p. 73.

¹⁶ Bullinger, *Der Tügg*, fol. 6/r. 155

¹⁷ Emanuele Colombo, “Western Theologies and Islam in Early Modern World,” p. 485.

Jesus is the Son of God, regarding him only as a messenger of God. With the denial of Christ's sonship goes the denial of the Trinity. The Qur'ān also denies the death and resurrection of Christ and his role as the only mediator. This rejection of the work of Christ means the rejection of the doctrine of justification through faith alone."¹⁸ Even with limited knowledge of Islam, and with numerous problematic claims, Bullinger was still able to ascertain the way that differences about Jesus remained—as it was legendarily claimed b the King of Axum.

Like Zwemer, Jan Slomp's study of Calvin and Islam suggests that there are certain resonances between Calvin's theology and Islamic thought, even suggesting that "It might even be possible to suggest some parallels between the Meccan prophet and the Genevan reformer, such as in the way they conceived the relevance of their respective messages as formative forces for construction a society in agreement with divine injunctions."¹⁹ Of course, these similarities are neither known nor explored by Calvin, who instead primarily references the Turks as a foil to critique Christians. In addition, the fact that Muslims affirm much about God's nature, attributes, and sovereignty, as well as God's work in creation, law, and revelation is not sufficient. What Islam lacks, namely an account of God as Father and Jesus Christ's nature and work, is more important than what it shares. In the only reference to Islam in the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Calvin writes, "Faith in God is faith in Christ... So today the Turks, although they proclaim at the top of their lungs that the Creator of heaven and earth is God, repudiate Christ and substitute an idol in the place of the true God."²⁰ Now while Calvin's claim about idolatry seem odd given Islam's insistence rejection of *shīrk*, his

¹⁸ Emidio Campi, *Shifting Patterns of Reformed Thought*, p. 73.

¹⁹ Jan Slomp, "Calvin and the Turks," pp. 129-130.

²⁰ John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, 2:6:4

assertion that Christology is a key feature of Christian theology and the implication that appeals to a generic monotheism are insufficient are key insights.

Campi, while noting important nuances in Bullinger's and Calvin's approaches to Islam that distinguishes them from the broader milieu, overstates his case when he claims that "the bulk of their contributions to the discourse did not consist of irresponsible *ad hominem* attacks, but rather of philological, historical and theological arguments."²¹ Certainly, Bullinger and Calvin are to be distinguished from some of their contemporaries and the broader Christian tradition by not resorting to descriptions of Muslims as heathens and barbarians. Additionally, Calvin's appreciation of the moral seriousness of Muslim practice and their deep commitment to living in submission to God, which Luther also highlights, is a commendable recognition of Islamic piety.²² At the same time, their work often lacks the necessary understanding of Islam for it to amount to a genuine theological argument. For instance, Calvin's comments about Christology being one, if not *the*, line in the sand that divides Christians and Muslim is accurate. His claim that Muslims "put their Muhammad in the place of God's Son"²³ does not amount to a theological engagement with Muslim critiques regarding God's unity and transcendence and also misunderstands how Muslims understand Muhammad and the Qur'ān. In some way, this is to be expected since "it is clear that Calvin had only very casual knowledge about Islam and its teachings and had relatively little opportunity to come into contact with Muslims."²⁴ The mixture in Calvin and other early Reformed thinkers like Bullinger between genuine insights regarding key differences between Christians and Muslims over Christology and other theological claims, and also

²¹ Emidio Campi, *Shifting Patterns of Reformed Thought*, p. 79.

²² Emidio Campi, *Shifting Patterns of Reformed Thought*, p. 77.

²³ *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt Omnia*, 27:261.

²⁴ Jan Slomp, "Calvin and the Turks," p. 127.

genuine misunderstandings and stereotypes about Islam, reverberate in the later Reformed dogmatic tradition.

Francis Turretin

The study of post-Reformation Reformed theology has blossomed in the past few decades. Led by the pioneering and comprehensive work of Richard Muller, figures such as Theodore Beza, Johannes Cocceius, John Owen, and Francis Turretin—to name only a few—are increasingly recognized as important theological thinkers that advance, nuance, and develop the Reformed dogmatic tradition. These readings have pushed against early characterisations that depict Reformed scholasticism as a deviation and devolution from the early Reformers. Scholarship on the ways that Reformed scholastics and orthodox engaged with Islam, however, remains a vastly understudied area of research. This is despite the fact that the 17th and 18th centuries saw a marked increase in Western knowledge of Islam and the beginnings of what became orientalist scholarship.²⁵ Moreover, there are tracts on Islam written by major theologians such as Cocceius and comments on Islam scattered throughout the writings of Beza, Jean-Alphonse Turretin, and Moyse Amyraut.

One of the most influential and comprehensive Reformed thinkers of the 17th century was the Swiss-Italian scholastic Francis Turretin (1623-1687), author of the three volume *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*.²⁶ Given the systematic nature of Turretin's theological writing and the fact that he “displays an awareness of Islam...Turks, Persians, and others,”²⁷

²⁵ See for instance, Andrew Gow and Jeremy Fradkin, “Protestantism and Non-Christian Religions” in Ulrika Rublack (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²⁶ Turretin's influence on American Reformed theology in the 18th and 19th centuries was particularly important. See E. Brooks Hollifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), ch. 18.

²⁷ James E. Bruce, *Rights in the Law: The Importance of God's Free Choice in the Thought of Francis Turretin* (Amsterdam: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), p. 14.

his work offers a key window into the place and function of Islam in Reformed scholastic dogmatic theology. Throughout the twenty topics examined in his *elenctic* theology, Turretin occasionally discusses or references both Muhammad and the Turks.

Turretin's project begins by defining theology and making clear its relationship to Scripture. The prolegomena covers questions of theology's scope and aim, its relationship to philosophy, and develops an account of revelation, both special and general. Richard Muller notes how "since it is the purpose of theology to teach savingly of God, the *ectypal* theology of revelation deemphasizes 'natural revelation' as insufficient for salvation and develops primarily the teaching of Scripture."²⁸ Still, Turretin affirms the use of reason and philosophy as ancillary tools within the overarching scripturally founded work of theological discourse. Within these opening two topics, Francis Turretin offers a number of passing references to Islam, Muḥammad, and Islamic Theology. In every instance, the mention of Islam is used to clarify internal Christian theological claims and to advance or justify Christian and distinctly Reformed protestant argumentation. It is a religious tradition that must be classified apart from Christianity, but also somewhat ironically at times, Islam is deployed as a source to buttress and justify certain Christian and Reformed ideas that are shared with it.

For instance, in the second question of the first topic in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Turretin asks about the term theology, its nature, and purposes. In the process of defining the space and limits of theology, he develops an argument about how to distinguish between true and false theology. Within this broader section on Greek philosophy, Turretin also mentions Islam and Judaism as "infidels and heretics" who "openly rejected Christ."²⁹

²⁸ Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 144.

²⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, translated by George Musgrave Giger, edited by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishers, 1992), I.2, p. 4

While this harsh evaluation follows in the longer tradition of Christian views on Islam, Turretin does go on to recognise that “their theology may contain some truth, yet because the greater part is false and errors fundamental, it is properly called false.”³⁰ Turretin’s double comments about Muslims as both heretical and yet containing some truth provide the intellectual foundation on which his later references to Islam build.

In the second topic dedicated to Holy Scripture, Turretin again engages in passing with Islam, more specifically to the Islamic claim that God has spoken a divine Word in the Qur’ān through the prophetic ministry of Muḥammad. The importance of Holy Scripture is vital to Turretin’s theological method and he seems aware—how much so is unclear—that Muslims also claim that Scripture serves as a standard for theological and ethical discourse. Turretin’s approach to these Muslim claims is eclectic and almost contradictory. In the first place, he assumes that Islamic claims are false and implies that Muhammad was an imposter who “feigned conferences” with Gabriel.³¹ Interestingly this negative evaluation of the Qur’ān does not stop Turretin from later arguing that Muslim claims about the divine Book are evidence of the need for special revelation. The fact that Muḥammad attests to have been spoken to by God through Gabriel is not proof of Islamic revelation, but it is indirect support for Turretin’s argument about Christian Scripture. This move to use Muḥammad to support Christian claims is made a second time when Turretin describes the internal and external marks of the truth of Christian scripture. He avers that Muḥammad, despite being an adversary to Christianity, offers testimony “concerning both testaments” of Christian Scripture.³² What exactly Turretin knows about Muḥammad and the Qur’ān on these points is far from clear. He does not quote a *Sura* but instead suggests his readers consult others like

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I.2.1 p. 55.

³² Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I.2.4.viii, p. 63.

“Vives, Plesseus, Grotius and others.”³³ Any attentive reader of the Qur’ān, however, is aware that Turretin is using the Qur’ān’s claims that both the Torah and Gospel are revelation of God as external support for the Bible. There is no recognition, however, of the complexity of Islamic understandings of Jewish and Christian Scriptures and the ways that Muslims have interpreted these ideas in ways quite contrary to Turretin’s assumption. Taken together, Islamic notions of divine revelation are both dismissed and deployed for Christian dogmatic gain. Muslim claims to divine revelation cannot be counted as true in themselves since they deny the incarnation of Christ, the Trinity, and Christ’s salvific work, but the Muslim recognition of prophecy and divine Speech can be used as indirect proof for Christian claims.

There are two other occasions in Turretin’s work where he positively draws a comparison between Christian and Islamic theology to support his own claims. In his section devoted to the doctrine of creation and theological anthropology, he references Muslim ideas about creation and Adam as secondary proof of Christian claims. “But the constant opinion thus far not only among Christians, but also among the Jews (yea even among the Mohammedans themselves) has been that Adam was created in the beginning of the world and was the first man.”³⁴ Later in a discussion of Christology, Turretin again makes a passing comment about Muslim and Qur’anic claims about Jesus as derivative evidence of Christian claims. The fact the Muslims and Jews “acknowledge...that the most perfect purity of life, joined with honesty of the soul, shone in him”³⁵ is taken to indicate that Jesus was sent by God. Here there, like in his previous discussions of revelation and Scripture, there are intriguing possibilities for further comparative work that are unsurprisingly not pursued by Turretin. Muslims do, in fact, claim that Jesus was sent by God and is both the word and

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I.5.8.ii, p. 457.

³⁵ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.13.2.xxvii, p. 298

spirit of God (*kallimatullah* and *rūhullah*) as well as the messiah (*masīh*). While these do not amount to theology of the incarnation or of the two natures of Christ, they present possibilities for constructive argumentation that contemporary Reformed theologians might pursue. For Turretin, however, the lingering ‘truth’ of Islam that was named in the opening prolegomena justifies appeals to Muslim claims that resonate with Christian ones. Still these positive connections between the traditions are far outweighed by more polemical concerns.

The later references to Islam or Muḥammad in Turretin’s scholastic theology are more commonplace and primarily revolve around polemical comparisons either between Christians and Muslims or between Protestants and Catholics. First, he often compares Islamic ideas about God, religion, and the human condition with Christian ones. The Trinity, for instance, is a key doctrinal idea that distinguishes Christians as true believers in God from Jews, Muslims and heathens.³⁶ Like Calvin and Bullinger before him and Schleiermacher after him, Turretin sees in Islam a fixation on carnal pleasures, exemplified in vision of heaven as non-symbolic.³⁷ His most polemic passage comes in his critique of Islam’s spread and growth, where he argues that Islam grew through and by violence. “Nor did the Turkish domination rage so much by fraud as by force; nor did it attack the conscience so much as the body; nor do we read or its using such lying signs or tricks in order to install its poison.”³⁸ Drawing on longstanding Christian and Western views of Islam that continue to reverberate today, Turretin sees the military advancements of the emerging Muslim empires as co-terminus with the spread of Islam as a religion. This includes a contrast between Jesus and Muḥammad, one that is often found in everything from common internal polemics to seminal scholars of dialogue in the 20th century, such as Kenneth Cragg, around the establishment of religion

³⁶ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I.3.24.x, p. 262.

³⁷ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III.20.9.xxiv, p. 617.

³⁸ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III.18.11.xvi, p. 76

through violence.³⁹ While all of these comparisons do name real distinctions between Christianity and Islam, be in theology, practice, or history, none of them include significant enough engagement with Muslims and Islam to amount to anything more than brief asides to reinforce Christian superiority.

Following in a long tradition of Christian discourse ‘about’ Islam, Turretin commonly uses Islam as a reference within and for intra-Christian debates. Like his arguments on Scripture and revelation, this occurs in multiple ways. Islam might be invoked to support Protestant or Reformed arguments against Catholics in one instance, even as Catholics might be negatively compared with Muslims in another. For instance, Islam’s dominant position of rejecting any images in worship is referenced to support Reformed critiques of iconodules, when Turretin claims that the practice of using images in worship scandalises “not only unbelieving Jews and Mohammedans, but believing Christians.”⁴⁰ This positive connection between Reformed and Muslim practices, however, can quickly switch to more polemical comparisons that combine Catholics and Muslims. In lengthy section on the nature of divine law and its relationship to post Tridentine Catholic theology, Turretin compares Islamic notions of law as being one of gradual improvement with perceived problems in Catholic moral theology. “From their muddy pools the Mohammedans seem to have derived that expression in the Koran: Moses introduced a less perfect law. Christ a more perfect, but Mohammed a most perfect.”⁴¹ This is compared with Catholic ideas about the “imperfection of the law,” and then used to buttress Reformed orthodox claims that the moral law is perfect. Catholics and Muslims alike, then, have views of the law that depart from Scripture and the teachings of Jesus.

³⁹ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.13.2.xxv, p. 297.

⁴⁰ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.11.10.vii, p. 65

⁴¹ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.11.3.ii, p. 19.

Of course, it was not only Protestants that negatively compared their Christian opponents to Muslims; Catholics did likewise. Thus, Turretin gives some space to Catholic critiques that invoke Islam to libel Protestant positions. For instance, the Reformed arguments about predestination and the invisible church are leveraged by Catholic critics as signs that “the Turkish Mohammedans and heretics can be members of the church, provided they have been predestined.”⁴² Reformed theologies of the church and providence seemingly imply an openness to non-Christians belonging. Turretin walks a careful balance in his response to these Catholic questions, not wanting to assert positively the inclusion of Muslims in the church, but also not wanting to grant the theological position of 17th century Catholicism. Thus, he argues that we cannot know *a priori* who is or who is not a member of the church and only those who are effectually called by Christ are properly depicted as members. And yet, this is not something known *in via* since “we cannot pronounce certainly concerning this or that one in particular” even as we can know what is the true church of Christ.⁴³ Following in a line of interpretation of Augustine advanced by Calvin and others, Turretin both asserts the centrality of Christ and the importance of membership in the visible Church, while leaving open the mystery of the invisible church and power of God’s effectual call.

In sum, there are three key features to Turretin’s engagement with Islam: the first is to mention Islam in the process of establishing the foundation or prolegomena to a Christian theology, both around natural theology and Scriptural revelation; the second is to compare Christian doctrinal conceptions with an Islamic one, which serves either apologetic or polemic ends. Finally, as has been the case in much of Christian polemical debate, Islam is

⁴² Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III.18.3.xxvii. p. 22.

⁴³ *ibid.*

employed regularly for intra-Christian rivalry, in the case of Turretin for polemics against Catholics. As we shall see, Turretin does not engage with Islamic thought as such, although he appears aware of certain key features of the Sunni tradition; he deploys the trope of Islam and certain key features of Muslim piety in complex ways to advance his own theological agenda.

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Given his status as the founder of the modern liberal theological tradition, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is often invoked as a thinker that makes a decisive break from his scholastic and orthodox forebears. In one sense, this is correct as *Christian Faith* is marked throughout by methods and conclusions that challenge and reorient Protestant theology in general and Reformed theology more particularly. And yet, as B.A. Gerrish, Dawn DeVries, and the more recent scholarship of Paul Nimmo and Bruce McCormack have argued, Schleiermacher's thought remains deeply marked by the categories and frameworks of Reformed dogmatics.⁴⁴ Schleiermacher makes this plain in both the often overlooked subtitle of *Christian Faith: Interconnectedly Presented in Accordance with the Principles of the Evangelical Church* (*Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche*), as well in §2's assertion of being writing a dogmatic and theological work located within the Christian church.⁴⁵ His work is both the initiation of a liberal theological tradition

⁴⁴ See for instance, B.A. Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginning of Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1984), B.A. Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Dawn DeVries, *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), pp. 63-88, and Paul T. Nimmo, "Schleiermacher on justification: a departure from the Reformation?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66, no 1 (2013), pp. 50-73.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, translated by Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016),

and a work of Reformed dogmatic thought occupied with traditional questions about creation and providence, original sin, and Christ's offices.

In terms of our study of the place of Islam in Reformed Theology, Schleiermacher's ground breaking *On Religion: Speeches to the Cultured Despisers*, as well as the opening paragraphs to his *Christian Faith*, are often cited as offering a new and innovative account of the nature of religion that open up Christian theology to the ideas and claims of non-Christian religions. Certainly, Schleiermacher's argument in *Speeches* that religion is best categorized as an intuition and feeling and not as either ethics or metaphysics, as well as his argument in the *Christian Faith* that religion is the feeling of absolute dependence (*das schlechthinige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*), are supple enough to include a range of religious communities and traditions. Schleiermacher's philosophical and romantic influenced accounts of religion as intuition or feeling press against easy categorisations of religious truth as a straightforward either/or. He argues as much in §7 of *Christian Faith*, "the notion that at the very least Christian piety is supposed to related to most other formations of piety as true to false, a claim indeed heard frequently enough, does not comport with our proposition."⁴⁶ Rather than orienting his theology around dogmatic claims based on propositional truth claims, Schleiermacher aims to offer an account of the range and stages of piety and religious self-consciousness within various human beings and religious communities.

The implications for Christian theological approaches to Islam, then, would appear promising for Schleiermacher or a theologian engaging with Islam in a Schleiermachian vein. Hugh Goddard notes this in his book, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, where he includes the great preacher and professor of Berlin as a thinker whose theology and

⁴⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §7, pp. 48-49.

frameworks provided openings for a shift toward constructive Christian-Muslim Relations. Drawing on the above quotation, Goddard contends that Schleiermacher conceives of the relationship between the two great religion as “not one of truth and falsehood, but rather truer and less true.”⁴⁷ In a short footnote, the eminent theologian and Schleiermacher, B.A. Gerrish asserts that while “Schleiermacher asserts that his presentation is relative to dogmatics, and that dogmatics is only for Christians (*Gl.*, §11.5). But presumable a descriptive Islamic dogmatics could be written on Schleiermacher’s principles by a Muslim, who, of course, would write from Muslims and presuppose the truth of Islam.”⁴⁸ Mun’im Sirry also notes positively how Schleiermacher’s chastened account of the Trinity at the end of his *magnus opus* might reframe Islamic and Christian debates on God.⁴⁹ By focusing on piety, religious self-consciousness, and the stages of growth and truth, Schleiermacher would seem to be a prime source for developing new frameworks for Christian approaches to Islam and Muslims.

The actual material content of *Christian Faith*’s discussion of Islam, however, is not nearly so positive. While Schleiermacher resists ascribing epitaphs of heretic or anti-Christ to Muḥammad, he also shows far less interest in Islam than Turretin or Bullinger before him, or Bavinck after him. Unlike these thinkers, there are no references to the Qur’ān, the prophethood of Muḥammad, or Islamic claims about God’s unity (*tawḥīd*) in the *Christian Faith*. Instead, Schleiermacher’s engagement with Islam is limited to §8 and §9 of the work, where he seeks to delineate the differences between religious communities.⁵⁰ While there

⁴⁷ Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2000), 150.

⁴⁸ B.A. Gerrish, *Continuing the Reformation: Essays on Modern Religious Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 199.

⁴⁹ Mun’im Sirry, *Scriptural Polemics: The Qur’an and Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 165-166.

⁵⁰ For more on Schleiermacher’s account of religion, both in the *Speeches* and *Christian Faith*, see Richard R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009); Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräb, eds., *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and The Future of Theology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010); Andrew Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the*

have been critiques of Schleiermacher's schema of religions,⁵¹ less has been written on how he negotiates the challenge that Islam seemingly poses to his schema and the claim that within the monotheistic traditions, Christianity is the “most complete among the most developed forms of religion.”⁵²

As with many other theologians, the primary framework through which Islam and Muslims are engaged is as a tool or stepping stone to establish Schleiermacher's own claim that Christianity is the highest stage of religious consciousness and piety. This may sound odd given the previous statements about his desire to avoid categorising religions in terms of true or false. However, in §8 of *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher constructs an historical model to interpret the variety of religious expressions, arguing that there are subordinate and higher stages. Amongst the lower or subordinate stages are fetishism, polyolatry, and monolatry, which culminate in the highest stage of monotheism. All of these other formations of piety do express something of the finite's dependence on the infinite or some form of God-consciousness, but monotheism is the “highest stage” which all others are subordinated to and are “destined to move into.”⁵³ Schleiermacher develops a model of religions borrowing from his philosophy of religion that culminates in monotheism. This leaves him with the conclusion at the end of §8 that “history shows us only three great communities—Judaism, Christianity, and Muhammadism (sic).”⁵⁴

Natural Order (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Christiane Ehrhardt, *Religion, Bildung und Erziehung bei Schleiermacher: Eine Analyse der Beziehungen und des Widerstreits zwischen den Reden über die Religion und den Monologen* (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2005).

⁵¹ The critiques of Schleiermacher by religious studies scholars, philosophers, and theologians are legion. For a helpful guide and summary of these distinct trajectories of thought, see Dietrich Korsch and Amber L. Griffioen, eds., *Interpreting Religion: The Significance of Friedrich Schleiermacher's Reden über Die Religion for Religious Studies and Theology* (Heidelberg: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) and Theodore Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁵² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith* §8.4, p. 56.

⁵³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith* §8, pp. 49-50.

⁵⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith* §8.4, p. 55.

At this stage in the argument, Judaism and Islam present concrete alternatives and challenges to Schleiermacher's schema. They both appear to fit his criteria of a universal and teleological religion that fit the delineation of the most advanced religions. However, rather than engage either tradition in any substance he finds ways to categorise as somewhat less than full monotheistic. In terms of Islam, this is a lost opportunity. Schleiermacher could have taken the opportunity to engage significantly with Islamic thought and Muslim piety as an alternative but at times overlapping expression of absolute dependence on God and a form of religious life that inculcates God consciousness. Alternatively, like Gerrish suggests in the aforementioned quote, the Berlin professor and preacher might have simply noted that Islam offers a particular formation of piety and God consciousness that he cannot engage since his aim is to explicate the piety and God consciousness formed in the Christian community and shaped by faith in Jesus as the Redeemer (which is the actual theological aim of *Christian Faith*). Instead of either exploring, or noting difference and moving on, Schleiermacher engages in an odd apologetic dismissal of Islam that is a hallmark for the ways that Islam functions as a trope for Christian theological purposes.

In a short comment about Islam in §8, he posits that “despite its strictly held monotheism, by its passionate character and by the strikingly sensory content of the notions it holds, Islam...betrays a strong influence from that sway of sensory orientation on the marked quality of its religious stirrings, which usually holds people fast at the stage of polyolatry.”⁵⁵ In one dense sentence, Schleiermacher translates Islam's ardent commitment to the absolute oneness of God into a digression from Christianity's teleological and true commitment to worship God alone. This is an odd claim, particularly given Islam's critiques of Christianity

⁵⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §8.4, pp. 55-56.

as veering toward *shirk*, and Islam's insistence on absolute monotheism. The reasons for such an assessment are opaque, but given Schleiermacher's relative lack of engagement with either Judaism or Islam, he is likely relying on certain assumptions and stereotypes regarding Islam that have been passed down through Western discourse such as the idea that Muslims are "singularly obsessed with the flesh."⁵⁶ Similarly, in §9 of *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher again briefly comments on Islamic monotheism, only to dismiss it as a lesser or lower form to both Christian and Greek thought and practice. In a discussion of the balance between freedom and dependence in piety, he argues that "Islam, on the other hand, does not display the same subordination of passive states to active ones in any fashion. Instead, this formation of piety comes to a complete standstill in the consciousness of unchanging divine ordinances of fate."⁵⁷ Islam's strong view of divine providence, and the Muslim practice of responding to life through the ubiquitous *inshā'allah*, is interpreted as a sign of passive acceptance. Rather than the feeling of absolute dependence being cultivated in a piety marked by trust and action, Schleiermacher interprets Muslim piety as simply "resting in those acts of fate" and thus subordinates the moral to the natural.⁵⁸

Taken together, these comments indicate that Islam is primarily a stage or step on the way toward Schleiermacher's developing his own theological and philosophical programme. Islamic thought and Muslim life and practice is not a site for investigation or comparison but a trope from which to justify internal Christian claims. "While the theoretical framework of his model of religion might on one level appear to relinquish the religious and cultural supremacy of Christianity, he nevertheless colonizes and re-codifies Islam in a manner to suit

⁵⁶ Andrew Gow and Jeremy Fradkin, "Protestantism and Non-Christian Religions" in ed. Ulinka Rublack, *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 287.

⁵⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §9.2, p. 67.

⁵⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith* §9.2, p. 67.

his argument.”⁵⁹ In the process, Islamic thought and Muslim piety and practice are not understood or engaged but reduced within a simple category or schema that can be contrasted to a superior Christian model. Schleiermacher seemingly implicitly recognizes the challenge that Islam presents to his account of religions and his claim that Christianity is the pinnacle of piety. Islam is a global and universal religion that recognises the creaturely dependence on the absolute or divine. As such, it would seem to present unique and particular possibilities and challenges to Schleiermacher’s scheme. At the same time, rather than engage with Islam and the complex challenges that it poses to Christianity as a monotheistic religion that emerges after Christianity and as a challenge to its perceived theological infelicities and shortcomings in piety, Schleiermacher neatly categories Islam as a fatalistic return polyatolatriy. In the end, whatever possibilities that Schleiermacher’s theological disposition and philosophical approach might hold for engaging Islam and the Reformed theological tradition are not enacted in his own writing and thought.

Herman Bavinck

The Dutch neo-Calvinist, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), provides an interesting final case study in our examination of the function and place of Islam in Reformed Dogmatic thought. Of the authors surveyed in this essay, Bavinck shows the most interest in Islam and a seeming awareness, however inchoate, of the internal debates and traditions with Islamic thought and practice. He also studied Arabic briefly while at Leiden and developed a lifelong correspondence with Snouck Hurgronje, a friend of Bavinck’s from Leiden University, who would go on to become an important Dutch scholar of Islam. Dirk van Keulen has argued that

⁵⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §11, p. 112.

Bavinck's comparative openness to Islam is directly related to this friendship. They "stayed in contact with one another throughout their lives and sent each other their publications."⁶⁰ Given both this personal relationship and his comparative awareness of Islamic thought, Bavinck offers an important perspective on the changing approaches to Islam in the late 19th century. Bavinck's position on Islam combines elements from both Turretin's and Schleiermacher's approach. Like Schleiermacher, Bavinck offers an account of religion as such and interrogates its forms and essence. Like Turretin, Bavinck develops arguments around general and special revelation, as well as an account of Scripture. In both of these sections, Bavinck makes passing references to Islam and Muḥammad. Islam is thus a minor, although important, part of Bavinck's account of theological foundations. In addition, Bavinck also makes passing references to Islam, Muslim piety, and Muḥammad throughout the rest of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, arguments that show a more advanced theological understanding of Islamic thought than any other major Reformed dogmatic theologian (an admittedly low bar, but significant nonetheless).

The first—and seemingly only—reference that Bavinck makes to Islam in the prolegomena to his *Dogmatics* appears in Part IV on Revelation in the subsection on general revelation and religion.⁶¹ Here Bavinck aims to sketch an account of both paganism and non-Christian religions that holds together the scientific studies of his day and the Scriptural vision of the world and religion, as well as his earlier discussion of religion with his arguments on general revelation. Bavinck offers a defence of a Christian account of religion over and against the more evolutionary views on offer in the late 19th century and contends

⁶⁰ Dirk van Keulen, "From Talking about to Speaking With: The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and Islam," in ed. John Bowlin, , *The Kuyper Center Review, Volume 2: Revelation and Common Grace*

⁶¹ For more on Bavinck and revelation see James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), chap. 5.

that Scriptures account for the origins of polytheism and paganism “commends itself by its simplicity and naturalness.”⁶² Bavinck contends that Scripture views non-Christian religions as marked by darkness, idolatry, lies, and thus a “severe judgement” must be rendered against them.⁶³ While he remains bound to this claim, he does not only offer an invocation of texts like Romans 1, Acts 17:30, or Psalm 106:28 against all other religions. In fact, he goes on to argue that a more nuanced theology of God’s abiding presence in creation and God’s general revelation are keys for interpreting religions and the claims of non-Christian prophets, sages, and mystics. “In that general revelation, moreover, Christians have a firm foundation on which they can meet all non-Christians” since it provides a “point of contact” with all human beings.⁶⁴ Moreover, he avers that the evolutionary accounts of religion that view religion as a progression from more local and ‘primitive’ to more advanced depends on an assumption of ‘the idea of God’ at the beginning of human and religious development. That is to say, Bavinck both critiques scientific studies of religion, but also allows their views to serve as an impetus for him to interrogate Christian notions of the divine Logos and general revelation to rethink other religions in a more nuanced way.

This is most evident in his critique of the dominant Christian view of other religious traditions and their founders. Rather than view Muḥammad and other non-Christian religions solely through the lens of idolatry, Bavinck argues that they must also be understood in and through his understanding of general revelation. This means that there are “elements of truth” present in non-Christian religion and that humans beings are able to see “adumbrations of the truth” since it “was not wholly concealed from them.”⁶⁵ It is here that Bavinck opens up

⁶² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*: 4 Volumes, translated by John Vriend, edited by John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2003-2008), I. p. 315.

⁶³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, p. 314.

⁶⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, p. 321.

⁶⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I., p. 318.

interesting possibilities for understanding Muḥammad in ways other than the dominant Christian interpretations of him as a false prophet. He notes and rejects the idea that Muḥammad can simply be dismissed as one amongst a group of “imposters, enemies of God, and accomplices of the devil.”⁶⁶ Bavinck writes that “ever since those religions have become more precisely known, this interpretation has proven to be untenable; it clashed both with history and psychology.”⁶⁷ Thus, Bavinck would appear to be arguing that Muḥammad, and by extension the Qur’ān, is not wholly divorced from divine revelation. It is not special revelation, let alone the Word of God in the sense that Muslim’s understand it to be, but it is a human response to the God’s general revelation.

“However, an operation of God’s Spirit and of his common grace is discernible not only in science and art, morality and law, but also in the religions. Calvin rightly spoke of ‘seeds of religion,’ a ‘sense of divinity.’ Founders of religion, after all, were not imposters or agents of Satan but men who, being religiously inclined, had to fulfil a mission to their time and people and often exerted a beneficial influence on the life of peoples. The various religions, however mixed with error they may have been, to some extent met people’s religious needs and brought consolation amidst the pain and sorrow of life. What comes to us from the pagan world are not just cries of despair but also expressions of confidence, hope, resignation, peace, submission, patience, etc.”⁶⁸

While he does not explicitly mention Islam in his positive arguments, the reference to Muḥammad at the outset of the section would imply that these affirmative statements would apply to Islam, and not simply to pre-Christian religions. Unfortunately, Bavinck does not specify or elaborate on these claims. If he had, we might have a striking theological assessment of Muḥammad as a reformer inspired by general revelation and the religious needs of his community who, while far from the final prophet that Muslims understand him to be, is nonetheless regarded with respect and admiration. Such an interpretation of

⁶⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* I, p. 318.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, p. 319.

Bavinck's reference to Islam in this section can be further justified by his later comments on Muḥammad. In a study of religious psychology and conversions, Muḥammad is said to have experienced a religious crisis in an analogous way to Paul and Luther.⁶⁹ In the end, while Bavinck's comments about Muḥammad and general revelation are provocative, it must be noted that he never explicitly makes this connection and also "never explicitly states what may be appreciated in Islam."⁷⁰ Nonetheless, to apply the general description that Bavinck offers of the founders of religions to Muḥammad would offer a much more gracious means of interpreting his work and prophetic ministry than those offered by either Calvin, Turretin, and Schleiermacher before him or Barth or Moltmann after him. Bavinck, then, leverages the Reformed notions of seeking truth wherever it may be found and that all truth is a gift of God to challenge prevailing Christian notions of Muḥammad.

Beyond this more constructive reflection on the relationship between general revelation and religions, which has provocative but underdeveloped ideas, Bavinck's oeuvre is scattered with other references to Islam. These considerations show a more advanced understanding of the complexity of Islamic thought and the variety of thinkers, movements, and arguments made within Muslim societies.⁷¹ Two key arguments are relevant. The first is in his discussion of God and theological language. Bavinck makes a number of references to the Mu'tazilite position his discussion of divine incomprehensibility. He notes, "The Qur'an frequently describes Allah in very anthropomorphic language. Among Muhammad's followers, however, many arose who interpreted this language spiritually and even refused to ascribe

⁶⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* III, p. 561

⁷⁰ Dirk van Keulen, "From Talking about to Speaking With: The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and Islam," p. 229.

⁷¹ Here I would demur from Dirk van Keulen's assessment that "Bavinck does not comment on any elements of Islam" by noting that Bavinck does in fact engage or reference key Islamic ideas, particularly around philosophy and theology. While this is an immensely helpful article on ideas of Islam in the Netherlands, it does not attend to some of the allusions in Bavinck's work. Dirk Van Keulen, "From Talking about to Speaking With," p. 227

any attributes to God.”⁷² The purpose and function of this recognition of key and recurring debates within Islam regarding the divine names, scriptural language, and Qur’anic hermeneutics, however, is to reinforce the uniqueness of Christianity in holding together the personality and absoluteness of God. That is to say, rather than engaging with debates ari thinkers about divine transcendence and scriptural descriptions of God, Bavinck appeals to the Mu‘tazili position to reinforce his claim that only Christianity accounts for God as both ari or other thinkers in his tradition, such as al-Juwaynī, al-Bāqallānī, or Fakhr dīn al-Razī would trouble such a neat assertion by Bavinck and force him to nuance his claims to Christian uniqueness.

Two other references to Islamic theology and philosophy indicate Bavinck’s knowledge of Islamic intellectual thought. In a discussion of Duns Scotus and nominalism, Bavinck makes a casual reference to Islamic philosophy and possibly al-Ghazālī. He notes that “certain Muslim theologians” asserted “that by the will of God all things are created anew from moment to moment apart from any connection with each other, from any laws of nature, without substance or qualities.”⁷³ On the surface, this quote indicates an increased awareness of Islam that moves beyond the polemics that have marked much of Reformed Christian theological discussion of Islam. However, the function of the quote is not so much to explore the similarities and differences between how God’s will, freedom, and justice are related, but to show Islam as an even more radical extreme than Scotus and Bavinck’s own Reformed position. In a second extended comment on the Mu‘‘azili, Bavinck inches toward the type of dialogical exchange that might be possible between Reformed theology and Islam. He opens a section on the divine counsel, Augustine, and pelagianism with a recognition of

⁷² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* II, p. 34.

⁷³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* II, pp. 236-237

the shared challenge of thinking about divine and human freedom. He writes that “Within Islam there has been controversy about predestination and freedom of the will, which was in many respects analogous to that in the Christian church. In Islam, God is the personification of absolute omnipotence and arbitrariness, before whom humans are passive. Opposition to this view arose in the second century of the hegira (sic), when the Motazelites (sic) defended free will, argued against predestination, and regarded justice, not omnipotence, as the characteristic essence of God.”⁷⁴ This brief summary includes a reading of Islam as marked by the same fatalism that Schleiermacher decries it as possessing, but also notes how diverse strands of thought arose to challenge and nuance such claims. Given the complex debates both within the Reformed tradition and between the Reformed tradition and other Christian traditions over providence and predestination, this is an area ripe for exploration and study. Bavinck himself does not carry through this opening framing, but this awareness of the complexity and diversity of Islamic thought does indicate an understanding of Islam as possible intellectual interlocutor.

Alongside these two examples, there remain a number of casual comments about Islam littered through the *Reformed Dogmatics* that serve little function except to dismiss Islam. His most critical comment on Islam comes in his discussion of sin, grace, and salvation. “Islam, which, remember, originated after Christianity, offers no deeper view of sin and grace.”⁷⁵ The Mu’tazili crop up again in a negative comparison to the Pharisees. And finally, Bavinck mentions how Islam is said to have formed a “theocratic state in which Arabs are the masters of subject peoples and the Qur’an serves as the statute book also for civil law.”⁷⁶ In all of these references, the function is to mention Islam in the service of Christian theological

⁷⁴Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* II, p. 347.

⁷⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* III, p. 493.

⁷⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*. IV, p. 277.

superiority and claims. The polemics that have dominated the majority of Reformed dogmatic thought remain a recurring note.

Even with a more developed understanding of Islamic thought and history, Bavinck only shows a passing interest in engaging with Islamic thought on its own terms, or exploring how comparative engagement might complicate Christian claims about scriptural language, divine and human freedom, and God's attributes and essence. This type of comparative project, of course, was not his aim and we should not critique him for not writing something that he made no promise to do. Still it is frustrating that given his seeming awareness of and interest in Islam that Bavinck does not do more with the possibilities that his thought opens up.

Conclusion: From Trope to Theological Interlocutor

The twentieth century has witnessed a marked increase in theological knowledge of Islam, as well as a concern for inter-religious engagement. And, while many Reformed Christian missionaries such as Zwemer, Hendrick Kraemer, and Johan Herman Bavinck, the nephew of Herman Bavinck, have produced important studies of Islam and missions, they all tend to be focused on conversion. Additionally, Christian Reformed theologians have yet to rise to the type of engagement with Islam that is present in the Catholic tradition. Whatever resonances and shared conceptual frameworks might present between the Reformed tradition and Sunni Islam, these have yet to be fully explored by theologians.

The most famous of all 20th Century Reformed theologians, Karl Barth, inveighs against Islam throughout his *Church Dogmatics*. Barth's limited comments on the religion shows a lack of comprehensive knowledge of Islamic thought or practice and thus he tends to rely on

crude stereotypes of Muslims.⁷⁷ Barth rejects the most common theological starting points for Christian-Muslim dialogue. He rules out appeals to shared theological foundations—be it monotheism, a scripturally attested Creator, or trust in divine providence—as doctrinal loci that might allow Christians and Muslims to comprehend one another. In his critique of natural theology, for instance, Barth argues against any notion that imagines belief in divine unity or monotheism as being somehow advantageous for human knowledge or interreligious exchange. “A good example of absolutising of uniqueness is provided by the noisy fanaticism of Islam regarding the one God.”⁷⁸ In terms of providence, Barth perceives Islamic acceptance of absolute divine governance coupled with the hiddenness of God to be a one-sided misunderstanding. “And in Islam this obscurity of God and His rule has been made a principle and therefore a caricature.”⁷⁹ This problematic account of divine sovereignty, one that Barth also perceives in certain Reformed Scholastics, must be re-thought in and through attention to God’s revelation in the act of Jesus Christ. Taken together, Barth asserts that, “It is unthinking to set Islam and Christianity side by side, as if in monotheism at least they have something in common. In reality, nothing separates them so radically as the different way they appear to say the same thing—that there is only one God.”⁸⁰

Beyond Barth, other major Reformed theologians of the 20th Century such as Emil Brunner and Jürgen Moltmann do not significantly advance engagement with Islam beyond the

⁷⁷ For a study of Barth’s views on Islam, see Glenn A. Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype: The Theology of Karl Barth as a Resource for Inter-Religious Encounter in a European Context* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), chps 1 and 2. Also, see my forthcoming book, *Law and the Rule of God: A Christian-Muslim Exchange* (Stanford University Press, 2018), ch. 5 for more on Barth’s use of anti-Islamic rhetoric to critique Nazism.

⁷⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.1, p. 448.

⁷⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.3, p. 28.

⁸⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.1, p. 449.

studies of this essay. Brunner's discussion of Islam are similar to the aforementioned theologians; he casually mentions Islam in passing in his account of the Trinity and monotheism.⁸¹ Jürgen Moltmann, for all his interest in global theology and diversity, only has a few passing allusions to the unity and Triunity of God, and politics.⁸² Princeton Theological seminary professor and theologian, Daniel Migliore comments in the context of post 9/11, remain indicative of the state of Reformed theology and Islam: "Adding to the problem is the lack of preparation that the Christian church and Christian theology bring to this new and complex engagement with Islam."⁸³

This essay has argued that approaches of Reformed theologians to Islam, Muslims, and Islamic thought has been primarily marked by three dominant features all of which hinder the possibility for rich dialogue, debate, and mutual learning. These critiques cut across the range of the Reformed tradition, from the early Reformers to the Reformed Scholastics and onward into the liberal tradition, neo-Calvinism, and dialectical theology. For all the substantial theological and methodological disagreements between the thinkers covered in this essay, they share discursive habits when referencing Islam. First, there is a recurring use of Islam as a trope deployed within intra-Christian or intra-Western polemics. This is often related to anti-Catholic claims, most notably in Luther's critique of Islam as works righteousness, but can also be a feature of intra-Protestant debates. While frequently these critiques are levelled against the Reformed by either Catholics or other Protestants, this is not an uncommon habit within Reformed dogmatic thought either. Karl Barth's argument against Nazism, for

⁸¹ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics Volume I*, translated by Olive Wyon (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), p. 205.

⁸² See for instance, Jürgen Moltmann, "Is Pluralistic Theology Useful for the Dialogue of World Religions?" in Gavin D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), pp. 149-156 and Jürgen Moltmann, *A Passion for God's Reign* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 49-50.

⁸³ Daniel Migliore, *The Power of God and the gods of Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), p. 116.

instance, relied heavily on anti-Muslim tropes and assume their ongoing vitality.⁸⁴ He write that it is “impossible to understand National Socialism unless we see it in fact as the *new Islam*, its myth as a new Allah, and Hitler as this new Allah’s prophet.”⁸⁵ Second, Islam functions as a typology in theological prolegomena from which a Christian theological project is distinguished and developed. Islam becomes a representation of a form of religiosity or theology that is either heretical or incomplete. Schleiermacher’s account of Islam in §8 and §9 in his argument for Christianity as the highest type of religion is a case in point. While these views recognise important distinctions between Christianity and Islam, they often do so by essentializing and simplifying Islamic traditions. The third and final way that Reformed theologians discuss Islam is by drawing a comparison, more often than not superficially, between a Christian doctrinal claim and Islamic ideas. This might be done in order to support a Christian claim by noting how it is shared with another monotheistic tradition—for instance, the case for biblical iconoclasm is made by Turretin and a commitment to divine sovereignty sometimes references Jewish and Islamic thought and practice. Alternatively, the juxtaposition between Islamic and Christian claims can be leveraged to critique the errors of Christian ideas or the problems in Islamic thought. Barth chastises the Reformed Scholastic discourse on providence as being too akin to Islamic notions of divine sovereignty. While this comparative motif has the potential to open up the type of Reformed dogmatic theology in dialogue that I advocate for, it demands a much more in-depth understanding and engagement than heretofore has been offered. Bavinck’s work

⁸⁴ See for instance Karl Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), 43, 64-66.

⁸⁵ Karl Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), 43. For an extended study of these texts and its relationship to later anti-Muslim popular discourse and the development of the term Islamofacism, see Joshua Ralston, *Law and the Rule of God*, chp. 5.

comes the closest to this, but ultimately more often falls into the more dominant habits of using Islam as a trope and does not leverage the possibilities of thinking about Muslims as genuine interlocutors in the same way as philosophers or more recently Jewish thinkers.

There is a time and place for the second and third habit of discourse. It can be theologically useful to distinguish Christian claims from Islamic ones and to note how a Christian view of God, creation, the human condition, and salvation are different than an Islamic one. And yet, when these become the primary and often times the only models of engagement—and when they rarely rise to the level of serious knowledge, nuance, and debate or are coupled with polemical attacks—then there will be no genuine advancement of the discussion between Reformed theology and Islamic thought. The opportunities and challenges that can be raised through a thorough and nuanced discussion of questions of shared concerns such as the relationship between God's law and justice or the nature of theological speech and anthropomorphism, or how God's sovereignty relates to human freedom and ethics that were mentioned at the beginning of the essay are thus lost.

To engage with these questions, what is needed is not so much an *a priori* theological interpretation of Islam or an account of a claim to revelation after Jesus, although these are all important, but a willingness to enter into deep nuanced discussion based on genuine learning and debate. That is to say, I want to advocate an approach to Islam that is not primarily a theology of Islam in the form of a theology of religions but a comparative theology in dialogue with Islam or a Reformed dogmatics in dialogue. The distinct but overlapping theological, philosophical, scriptural, and ethical concerns of the Reformed and Sunni traditions make them particularly well suited to be theological interlocutors. In saying this, it is also important to recognise that even when Christians and Muslim share concepts and questions, the criteria - or *furqān* - from which we evaluate claims and develop theological statements differ. Ideas about divine providence and human freedom do share conceptual

similarities and overlap but they are shaped and condition by the fundamental criterion of Christ and Qur'ān that differ. What is demanded is a mode of discourse, dialogue, and debate that allows for mutual exchange and learning that assumes neither inherent rivalry and difference nor essential sameness or unity.

Elsewhere, I have argued for how witness/shahīd might be one such framework for mutual learning and debate, but other options are possible depending on one's theological starting point.⁸⁶ Bavinck's account of general revelation and common grace, as well as his own practice of brief comparison, shows promise for those indebted to neo-Calvinism.⁸⁷ While Schleiermacher never developed an interest in Islam, other commentators have noted how his theological framework and focus on God-Consciousness, divine mystery, and piety opens possibilities for engagement. Turretin's scholastic model of debate, particularly his reliance on Aristotelian categories and his nuanced discussions of divine attributes, resonates well with certain Islamic claims offered by thinkers such as al-Juwayni and al-Baqallānī. And while it may not convince others, I have argued that Barth's commitment to particularity and his rejection the analogy of being might be chastened by comparative theology in order to offer a disposition for dialogue that can track and engage Sunni thinking, particularly al-Ghazālī's account of the divine names.⁸⁸ What is more important for serious theological engagement with Islam is not the particular internal Reformed theological starting point, but a commitment to cease approaching Islam primarily as a trope to shore up and advance internal Christian claims. Instead, Reformed theologians might risk approaching the Islamic

⁸⁶ Joshua Ralston, "Bearing Witness: Reframing Christian-Muslim Encounter in light of the Refugee Crisis" *Theology Today* 74:1 (2017): 22-35.

⁸⁷ For one example of such work, see Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Islamic Immigration in an Age of Terror* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2017).

⁸⁸ Joshua Ralston, "Analogies across Faith(s): Barth and Ghazali on Speaking after Revelation" in eds., Martha Moore-Keish and Christian Collin Winn, *Karl Barth and Comparative Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), chp. 8.

tradition as a serious intellectual opportunity and challenge. That is to say Islamic thought, in all its complexity and diversity, might be a genuine intellectual and theological interlocutor for Reformed dogmatic theology.